

Working Together to Realise Big ideas-creating a new environment for collaborative research

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How can the physical environment be configured to respond to new and evolving approaches to collaborative research? How can the potential of the built environment be harnessed to facilitate unexpected encounters, and encourage cross-disciplinary research?

In 2009 The University of Auckland initiated a design competition for a new 23,000sqm Science Centre that would provide spaces for future research activities for a key group of Science faculties. The competition design brief identified the concept of 'multi-disciplinarily' as critical to successful contemporary scientific endeavour, and it articulated a desire to promote interaction between the various departments where they had previously been somewhat isolated from each other.

In discussions around the project design we were regularly reminded by the various researchers who would eventually inhabit the building that it is often the unexpected or chance encounters that lead to the greatest break throughs, and in this context architecture has a crucial responsibility to design in possibilities for as many serendipitous encounters, conversations and opportunities to share work and ideas as possible.

The design offered by Architectus in response to the University brief was underpinned by a single key idea as to how a new building could be organised. This idea, captured in a simple diagram, was the deciding factor that led to Architectus being awarded the Science Centre project – for which construction was completed in 2016. As with many such ideas this simple diagram represented a culmination of many years of design work that has constantly explored the potential for social environments that invite - or even engineer – these sorts of chance encounters and related opportunities. This work has occurred across many project and building types – but in all these varied projects we have sought to realise the social potential inherent in the everyday use of the building.

Our presentation will discuss the design for the Science Centre, incorporating :

- Discussion around the initial 'Eureka' moment, with reflection on some of the work that preceded and informed the key idea.
- An outline of how the initial idea was developed throughout the various design stages, with a focus on how the initial idea has informed the design approach by the project team.
- A review of the outcomes for the new building's occupants, and how its design influences the way in which they work